

4/12/01 Fall from Elevation

A 24-year-old, father of two, was killed when the utility pole he was working on collapsed.

The victim was part of a two-person crew climbing and removing unused cable wire from wooden utility poles. Both the victim and his coworker had worked for their employer as ground personnel for a few years, however, only recently (approximately two months) started climbing utility poles.

The victim and coworker had been working all morning removing cable wire. This work required the workers to climb the wooden pole and disconnect the cable wiring. The two workers had completed work on three utility poles and stopped to have lunch with the victim's family. After lunch, the victim climbed the fourth utility pole to disconnect the wiring.

The victim was working at the 13-foot level on a 20 feet tall utility pole. The pole had been in the ground for decades, and was rotten at the base. The two workers had a boom truck with a clamping attachment that could have been used to stabilize the pole, however, they chose not to use it. The victim had just disconnected the cable wiring from the pole when it broke in two at ground level. The pole, with the victim holding on, fell backwards onto the roadway crushing him.

The incident is still currently under investigation.

Question to ask:

- Do you have procedures in place to inspect utility poles before they are climbed?

WAC 296-32-330 Overhead lines (Telecommunications) describes under what conditions wood poles need to be tested and the method for testing.

WAC 296-45-385 Overhead lines (High voltage electrical) requires that wood poles be inspected and provides an appendix) methods of inspection and testing wood poles, as guidance for employers.